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SUBJECT: ENCOURAGING AND SUPPORTING EMERGING YOUTH LEADERSHIP

¶1. (U) Summary. At a time of ferment in Kenya, when many observers are focused primarily on problems within the coalition government, new youth leaders are emerging who are pressing peacefully for change. They are cooperating across ethnic lines, and coordinating with civil society and religious leaders. They are focused on ending ethnic-based politics, promoting reconciliation, and implementation of the reform agenda. Their ultimate objective is the emergence of alternative political leadership. The vested interests are resisting this emerging leadership. We are working to encourage and support this emerging youth leadership, which is a positive and promising development. End summary.

¶2. (U) New youth leaders are emerging to mobilize young people around themes of rejecting negative ethnic politics and promoting reform in order to end the culture of impunity. These leaders are largely non-political. Through meetings, attendance at their forums, and direct assistance we are encouraging and helping facilitate the emergence of these new leaders. This message reports on our engagement with several groups. Septel will recommend additional steps which could be undertaken with additional resources.

¶3. (SBU) In late March the Ambassador, Mission political officers, and the head of USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives met with three of the main emerging groups: Kikuyus for Change, the Nyanza Youth Coalition, and Citizens Assembly of Rift Valley. The groups were aware of each other, but the meeting was the first time that they had come together in a systematic way. The discussion made clear that they are all focused on "how to detribalize the country," holding coalition leaders accountable to carry out reforms, helping to empower youth economically and politically, and creating a "national platform" to give the voice of Kenyan youth its proper impact on national affairs. They admitted that young people in Kenya today are in many respects as ethnically-centered as their parents. High unemployment, wanting someone else to blame for your troubles, and exploitation by ethnically-based politicians are largely responsible for this situation. The groups share a sense of urgency, and emphasized their view that "time is running out," since if reforms are not carried out within the next twelve months or so, the opportunity to do so will be lost with the approaching of the 2012 elections. As a result, Kenya will then experience a much greater crisis. For example, the leader of Kikuyus for Change said that there is a widespread view in Central Province, the Kikuyu heartland, that Kikuyus emerged as too weak during the crisis last year; people are arming and already preparing for the next anticipated conflict. The leader of Citizens Assembly, based in Rift Valley, the Kalenjin heartland which was the epicenter of violence last year when Kikuyus living there were attacked, said that people there are also arming in anticipation of the next conflict. The same situation exists in Nyanza.

¶4. (U) The youth leaders want to build "alternative youth leadership." They realize how hard this is in the face of vested political interests that seek to disrupt any such activity, but they believe that there is emerging appreciation among youth on the need

for such leadership in order to make their voices heard. Many youth realize that they were manipulated by politicians to carry out violence last year and do not want to be exploited again.

15. (SBU) Specifically, Kikuyus for Change is under pressure from the Kikuyu hardliners in the government and Parliament, some of whom have sought to compromise the movement through offers of funding. Citizens Assembly and the Nyanza Youth Coalition are experiencing similar pressures. The Nyanza Youth Coalition pointed out, for example, that Prime Minister Odinga exerts near monolithic political leadership in Nyanza and does not want to see the emergence of alternatives. The three organizations are working at the grassroots level to engage youth, elders, religious leaders, and others. Their goal is to mobilize youth through civic education and empowerment, eventually leading to emergence of alternative youth leadership at the national level. While they acknowledged that this is necessarily a complex and lengthy process, they reiterated the sense of urgency they feel. They maintained that youth all across the country are asking the right questions and that alternative national leadership could emerge more quickly than anyone expects.

16. (SBU) USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives is already supporting the efforts of the Nyanza Youth Coalition to mobilize and educate youth, and to exert pressure for political accountability. Kikuyus for Change have submitted proposals for similar support, as has Citizens Assembly, and we will endeavor to be supportive.

17. (U) The Ambassador strongly encouraged these efforts to promote youth leadership and expressed willingness to participate in their events in an effort to raise their profile. On April 8 the Ambassador attended public and private forums organized by Citizens Assembly in Nakuru in Rift Valley. The event was well-organized, as

NAIROBI 00000767 002 OF 003

the head of Citizens Assembly coordinated closely with the District Commissioner, elders, war veterans, religious leaders, and the Administrative Police. The day started with a public ceremony and forum which was attended by several thousand Kalenjins and Kikuyus. Peace torches were lit. The ceremony was the first time that the two communities had met since the violence last year. Local officials, the police, and others offered a united message on the need for peace and reconciliation. Reflecting the objective to work across ethnic lines, the leader of Kikuyus for Change spoke as well. The Ambassador spoke at length on the need to foster youth leadership, on peace and reconciliation, on the negative impact of ethnic politics, and on the importance of implementation of the reform agenda.

18. (U) The Ambassador then met with 30 youth leaders at a private forum sponsored by Citizens Assembly at Egerton University. At the invitation of Citizens Assembly, the Administrative Police and District Commissioner attended the forum and appeared remarkably open to constructive criticism. The leader of Citizens Assembly described the Administrative Police chief, who is pursuing an online masters degree, as very enlightened and committed to reconciliation and respect for human rights. The tone of the meeting was evident when the feisty female leader of Citizens Assembly jocularly but pointedly told the Administrative Police chief that she had invited him so that "you won't tear gas us and shoot at us the next time we demonstrate, since you know us now." The youth leaders at the forum represented an array of Rift Valley grassroots youth organizations. A USAID representative explained assistance we are providing in Rift Valley to promote reconciliation and accountability, including through support to local violence prevention and peace committee programs.

19. (SBU) We are staying in close touch with Kikuyus for Change, Citizens Assembly, and the Nyanza Youth Coalition to support their activities and to encourage them to maintain momentum. These organizations represent important emerging youth leadership, but there are many others not as well organized or as astute which are emerging across the country. We are working to reach out as broadly as possible to emerging youth leadership and will help play a catalytic role in bringing youth leaders into contact with one another. The strong political organizations that the existing political class and vested interests have, their access to large amounts of money through corruption, the culture of impunity which enables the police and others to intimidate, and the deep-rooted

nature of ethnic sentiments pose an enormous challenge to the efforts of emerging youth leaders. However, their task is not impossible. The way in which ordinary Kenyans, including youth, eventually spoke out across ethnic and political lines last year to press for an end to the crisis demonstrates the potential for Kenyans to pull together to advance national interests. Young people are increasingly questioning the status quo, and the pressure that civil society, religious leaders, the private sector, and media are exerting for reform is encouraging that process.

¶10. (SBU) One small example demonstrates the extent to which the political class is concerned about this emerging youth leadership. A Member of Parliament showed up at the Nakuru public forum, crashing it since he was not invited. He insisted on speaking briefly, but he was clearly uncomfortable not being the focus of attention and complained that the Citizens Assembly should have given him advance notice of the event. The Ambassador expressed strong support for Citizens Assembly, noting that the forum was intended as a platform for the Kenyan people to speak, and not as a political event. The Ambassador pointed out that he normally takes questions from Kenyans at town hall meetings, and suggested that Members of Parliament do so as well (they rarely do, since political gatherings are set-piece affairs at which they speak and depart).

¶11. (U) The Nakuru forum was covered by the media. The media, preoccupied with the daily wrangles within the coalition government, has yet to pick up on this important story of the emergence of alternative youth leadership. We are encouraging the media to focus on this story, and the Ambassador will participate in a number of other forums these and other groups will be convening to demonstrate support and to raise their profile.

¶12. (SBU) The media may be moving toward promoting the kind of concerted message that they delivered last year when they came together under the banner of "save our beloved country." On April 12 the Nation, one of the two leading dailies, ran an extensive story on a conference that 2,000 secondary school students held in Nairobi. "Secondary school student leaders have put the country's top leadership to shame by holding a successful national conference days after a small team of PNU and ODM negotiators failed to hold a crucial meeting on the state of the coalition government," the Nation reported. The five day meeting, the paper noted, gave a lesson to the coalition leaders on how to build consensus and find solutions to corruption and other problems. Student leaders spoke on the need to

NAIROBI 00000767 003 OF 003

"shun tribalism," and tackle national issues. The students, according to the Nation, told Kibaki and Odinga to "shape up or face a revolution at the next elections."

¶13. (SBU) If encouraged, supported, and given a higher profile, we should not underestimate the potential for youth leadership to emerge relatively quickly. The young people who are asking questions now will be voters in 2012 and may well have more of an impact on the political process than anyone at this point expects.

RANNEBERGER